

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current
scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, April 27, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "ASPARAGUS TIPS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Listeners, I couldn't let the month of April get by without talking about asparagus. For April is the big asparagus month of the year, if you judge by Department-of-Agriculture figures on carlot shipments. Take last year's figures, for example. Total shipments of asparagus for the year were 2202 carlots. About three-fourths of that whole year's total went out in the month of April alone -- 1649 shipments, to be exact. Contrast that April figure with July, during which only one carlot was shipped, and you will see why I think of April and asparagus together.

By the way, did you ever see a load of asparagus, or "long green", as the growers call it -- did you ever see it enroute from California to the eastern markets? Each bunch is wearing a blanket of wet moss. And these moss-covered bunches are all carefully packed in "pyramid crates" that protect the tender tips. Refrigerator cars rush the crates of asparagus across the country. And while the asparagus travels, it keeps right on growing. The producers count on that for they cut the stalks short to allow for an inch or two of growth during the trip across the continent.

I daresay you are familiar with the 2 kinds of asparagus on the market. One is the blanched or white asparagus which grows mainly in California and is used so largely for canning. The other is the familiar and popular green asparagus which most people think of as pushing up in the asparagus bed. The blanched asparagus has a milder flavor than the green, and also is less rich in iron and vitamin content.

Now perhaps you would like a few tips on buying asparagus at the market. Asparagus ages very rapidly after cutting -- ages as it lies in the market or grocery store. And it shows its age by tough, woody, angular stalks and spread tips. If you want tender, flavorful asparagus, you'll watch out for these signs of age. You'll look for stalks that are fresh, firm, tender and have compact tips. The marketing people say that a fresh tender stalk is brittle when you break it. They also say that tender asparagus punctures easily.

Perhaps you would like to know how to keep asparagus fresh after buying it. The foods people say that the sooner you use it, the better the flavor and texture. That rule goes for all fresh vegetables. But if you must keep it a day or overnight, if you buy it Saturday and want to keep it over Sunday, say, here's how. Untie the bunch at once, trim off the tough ends, wash and

dry the stalks, and put away in a covered dish in the refrigerator. Did you notice that I mentioned drying the stalks after washing? That is important because asparagus spoils easily if it is moist. Even in the refrigerator, wet tips of raw asparagus are likely to get slimy.

Here's an important point about washing the asparagus. Trim off those little scales down the side of the stalk before you wash it. Those scales are so likely to hold sand and dirt.

So much for buying and caring for asparagus. Now about cooking it. Perhaps I'd better repeat the usual tips about cooking green vegetables to hold the natural green color. To save the green color, cook uncovered in boiling lightly salted water until just tender. Never overcook. And never, never use soda in the cooking water unless you want to destroy the vitamins and also spoil the texture and flavor.

One big problem in cooking asparagus is to get the thick ends of the stalk cooked enough, yet prevent the tender tips from cooking too much.

The foods people have worked out several ways to meet that problem. One is to tie the asparagus together with a string and stand it upright in a saucepan for the first 10 minutes so the boiling water will have a chance to cook the stalks. Then, for the second 10 minutes, lay the bunch down flat in the boiling water to cook the tips.

Another method is the double-boiler method, part boiling and part steaming. This is a convenient cooking method but does not preserve the green color so well. Stand the bunch of asparagus in the bottom of a double boiler and add boiling water almost up to the tips. Then, turn the top of the boiler upside down over the tips. The steam will cook the tips while the boiling water cooks the stalks.

A third method is to trim each stalk up to the tender part and then cook it lying flat in boiling water in a large flat saucepan.

If you are interested in both keeping color and adding food value, you may prefer to cook asparagus in milk rather than water. Have some lightly salted milk just at the simmering point. Add asparagus cut in short pieces and simmer until it is tender. Then add butter and flour-and-water mixed together. Cook a few minutes until the milk thickens. Serve immediately. This is a delicious way of serving asparagus for children.

Asparagus is good served with just butter, salt and pepper. If you prefer your asparagus dressed up with a sauce, you have your choice of sour-cream sauce, white sauce, cheese sauce, and Hollandaise sauce.

I wish I had time to go into the details of canning garden asparagus, as several listeners have asked me to. But I can remind you anyway that for canning directions, you have only to write the Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C., and ask for the home canning bulletin. A copy is yours as long as there are any free copies on the shelves.

